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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 001791

SIPDIS

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TAGS: MOPS PREL EUN GG NU RU FR

SUBJECT: FRANCE JOINS U.S. IN OPPOSING NICARAGUAN
RECOGNITION OF SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

REF: STATE 96677

Classified By: PolMC Kathleen H. Allegrone for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

¶1. (C) The GOF shares USG opposition to Nicaragua's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia according to French MFA desk officer Philippe Garcia de la Rosa who spoke to poloff on September 22. Garcia said the GOF agrees with all points in reftel and further rejects efforts to liken the independence of Kosovo to Russian military action in S. Ossetia, Abkhazia and Georgia. He said the EU had already delivered similar points in a demarche to Managua.

¶2. (C) Garcia said President Ortega's decision to recognize ¶S. Ossetia and Abkhazia was "not surprising," as tensions between the West and Ortega, especially between Nicaragua and the EU, have been increasing. Garcia said Ortega, like Chavez in Venezuela and Morales in Bolivia, is trying to mask internal problems -- especially regarding government efforts to limit participation of opposition parties in the political process -- by diverting attention to international issues.

¶3. (C) For example, Garcia said the EU has recently been troubled by Nicaraguan vice foreign minister Coronel Keautz's threat on August 14 to declare Swedish ambassador Eva Zetterberg persona non-grata (PNG). While we defer to Embassies Stockholm and Managua on the political analysis of these issues, local Swedish embassy contacts in Paris told poloff on September 24 that Zetterberg departed post on August 21 as part of a global downsizing of Swedish missions, and not as a result of being PNGed. Although Zetterberg was publicly critical of GON efforts to limit participation of opposition parties in the upcoming November municipal elections, the Swedes indicated that the harsh public statement by Keautz was most likely the GON's way of expressing its displeasure with the closing of the Swedish embassy there.

¶4. (C) Garcia said the GOF and EU will continue to work to improve relations between the EU and GON, but noted that France would not be taking a leading role in this effort. Rather, France will remain "prudent" and "reserved" on bilateral relations with Nicaragua.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Garcia reflects a European preference to coordinate foreign policy within the European Union particularly on issues of relatively marginal importance in Paris. As if to exemplify the limited importance of Nicaragua in French foreign policy priorities, Garcia noted that Nicaragua has not had an ambassador in Paris for the past two years, the reasons for which he said were not clear. If this meeting is broadly reflective of overall French policy on Nicaragua, then France seems content to lend support to EU initiatives from behind the scenes. END COMMENT.

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